

VIEWING THE PAST FROM CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

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Abstract

The paper attempts to investigate how literature present and represent the past. In the making of historical fiction, the author sorts out facts and historical materials and then adds imaginative characters or events that liberate the author from historical reality. Thus, it de-familiarizes what is known as history and presented it as fiction. However, it still needs the element of plausibility and verisimilitude to reconstruct it into presentable historical fiction. Voicing the voiceless or rendering the forgotten history can be one of the aims in representing the past. Literature is capable in ordering the chaotic and complex historical facts by presenting some part but as a whole. Thus, it helps to shape the understanding of the past. Many author have endeavored to represent the traumatic past which is known as the blackest historical moment in Indonesia. The tragedy that kills millions of innocent people. The attempt to represent the past is triggered by the freedom gained along with the fall of New Order regime. Literary works can be one of the ways to understand the complexity of the tragedy.

Key Words: Past, History, Contemporary Literature

1. INTRODUCTION

History is always actual because the past constructs the way we are now. Thus, knowing our past is a must. Discussing the history is not simple and easy because there are an interwoven aspects surround it—politic, culture, or even economic power may influence the written of history.

Postmodern thinker argues that no one can depict the past in a comprehensive way. Ying (2006) emphasizes the fragmented and unfinished aspect of history that suggest history is something in the making and has dynamic nature. Accordingly, there is always an incompleteness in history which makes an interpretation or reinterpretation of the past becomes unending process. This leads to the acceptance of mini narration which has different perspectives from the official history to take a role.

In the era that is known as “post traumatic century”²⁴ assessing the past seems to be impossible. The historical catastrophe gives a traumatic experience that incomprehensible to be known. Trauma is untranslatable because the event is too unexpectedly and too fast. It is beyond human consciousness (Caruth, 1996 :3). Since it is beyond comprehension, it becomes a hole of history that is unwritten or undocumented. Indonesia also faces similar problem in writing a history. In 1965, Indonesia faces traumatic event that made thousands of its citizens killed. It left a scar in Indonesian history. However, history is controlled by the New Order regime for 32 years which silenced the survivor’s voice. The fall of Suharto gives an opportunity to disclose the marginal voice. However, telling traumatic event is not easy since no language can convey it comprehensively.

Literature can be used to present and represent the past and fill the gap that has not been covered by history, especially for the unattained past due to lack of document and recorded files or due to the political and ideological interest. Literature unfolds the restraint to testify and to give the possibility of what probably happened. It highlights the specific historical event that gives voice to those who are marginalized and silenced.

However, the presentation and representation of the past pose some problems. It raises the questions how literature tangles the distance past and renders the chaotic and complex historical past into a coherent and understandable event to give the voice to the voiceless.

²⁴ A term used by Felman and Dori (1992) to highlight the inhumanity event that happened in the twentieth century such as world war II, Holocaust, atomic bomb etc.

2. HISTORICAL FICTION: THE PAST FROM PRESENT

There are two main important points in this discussion. The way history is rewritten and represented in the contemporary narrative. The discussion is related to the temporal aspect includes past and present. The next discussion is the way narrative deals with the traumatic historical moment which might be unrepresentable. However, first the discussion will be focused on the nature of historical fiction.

The aim of historical fiction is to represent events happened in the past as part of human history. Ricoeur defines representation “as the privileged object of explanation/understanding, on the plane of the formation of social bonds and the identities at stake in them.” (Ricoeur, 2004: 253) When we represent something it means that we “stand for” something. Consequently, the representation in literary work “stand for” something that may correspond to the psychological, social and political bonds.

In the process of presenting the past, the author selects particular historical moment and the fact related to the narrative concerns. There is a conflicting present moment’s interest that shapes the author frame of reference in constructing and selecting the events. Author’s frame of references influence the depiction of the past.

In line with it, Robinson (2011) argues that history and fiction has an anachronistic nature since the past is addressed by present inquiry. Thus, discussing the past is not only related to the past but it is also related to the present moment. The bias of the present knowledge may influence our understanding to the past. However, the hindsight has also an advantage. It offers an emotional distance which gives an opportunities to address the past in a clearer and comprehensive way. Elsewhere, Robinson (2011) claims that *the present* is “a vanishing point on the axis of time.” Past, present, and future exist in present consciousness. In other words, time is always present. Past is something that has been done in the *present past* and future is something that will be done in the *present future* (Robinson, 2011: 6). This is a narrative challenge to reconcile the past based on the present perspective.

In analyzing how past is presented in the historical novel, Robinson (2011) proposes to analyze several narrative levels and interpretative aspects. First is the *emplotment*, that is the way author constructs events and actions from the past into coherent narrative. This *emplotment* is shaped by author’s interpretation of the past based on his frame of reference. This process constructs the *present past*. It is the past that influences by the value and perspective of the present time. In this sense, the interpretation of past is always in a flux and in a constant changing. Second is the narrative world which is embedded in the *emplotment*. It is a space where the characters as historical agent act and experience the representation of historical event or it is called a *past present*. Their act in the narrative world is directed towards *past future*. The third layer is *immersion*. *Immersion* is how the narrative world immerses the reader and makes them project themselves in the character’s shoe. Differ from Robinson that emphasizes *emplotment* as the construction of temporal aspects in causal relation –the past as the precondition of the event and the present as the antecedent of the future states- Haydes focuses on the influence of cultural frame such as tragedy, comedy, romance, and satire that shaped the narrative. Although the boundary limits the way narrative is interpreted, Haydes’ typology gives an insight in understanding the presentation of historical narrative.

Similar to Robinson (2011), Ricoeur (2004) divides the analysis of historical representation into two part. The first is the element of narativity and the second is connect the usage of narativity element into a wider contexts.

The selective role for figures of style and thought in the choice of plots, the mobilizing of probable arguments within the frame of the narrative, and the writer’s concern to convince by persuading are the rhetorical resources of staging a narrative. (Ricoeur, 2004 :236)

The quotation above underlines the important of the interpretation of narrativity to understand the wider context of the historical fiction.

3. HISTORY AND TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE IN NARRATIVE

Trauma at first refers to the physical wound; however, it is recently used to describe the wound in the psyche. Trauma is the peril experience that too overwhelming to be perceived by consciousness, and it has an after effect such as hallucination, bad dream, or even dissociation of the psyche. (Caruth, 1996: 2)

The mushroomed of the trauma theory in analyzing the after effect of traumatic experience in World War II and Holocaust has changed the concept of trauma. Trauma becomes inclusive, and it intertwines with the history.

“Within trauma theory, a historical event and its traumatising effect are often intimately entwined, and indeed the theory has developed largely in a response to the many historical events that challenged and affected the way the world, and the self within that world, were perceived” (Shulga, 2008:12)

The effect of catastrophic events in the History make it seems history that traumatizes. The theory at first focuses on the World War II and Holocaust survivor, however, it is used in wide context nowadays. Shulga (2008) uses trauma theory to analyze the representation traumatic history of Gulag in Rusia’s literature; and then Madsen (2007) uses trauma theory to analyze Korean’s women experience as comfort women during the Japanese military occupation. The theory of trauma emphasizes the incomprehensible nature of catastrophic events. The inhumanity that causes the event cannot be rendered and destroyed all the measurement. (Shulga, 2008:14)

Caruth (1996) in her book *Unclaimed Experience* point outs several aspects of trauma. Trauma resides in the events not just in the psyche. The events here is the event that is unexpected and make someone shocked. Although it is experienced, the nature of trauma itself is incomprehensible. Trauma is the swinging between death and life, the confrontation with life is sometimes more unbearable than confrontation with death. “What returns to haunt the victim, these stories tell us, is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not fully known” (Caruth, 1996: 6). The survivor cannot understand the reason of their survival and it traumatizes them. Trauma can also occurs while listening to other’s traumatic experience. Since one’s own trauma can be related to the others (Caruth, 1996: 8). Listening to other voice may not make the story fully acceptable but the listener also bears witness.

Since Trauma cannot be translated and unrepresentable, it raises the questions how to represent it in literary work. Caruth (1996: 5) notes that literature is related to the knowing and not knowing which resonate with the nature of trauma as unassimilated events in the consciousness.

4. THE REPRESENTATIVE OF 1965 HISTORICAL TRAUMA IN LITERARY WORK

Tragedy 1965 is traumatic moments that are not fully comprehended or ever properly recorded in history. There a gap and dark side here and there since the New Order Regime made its own version of history that delineates the role of Suharto as hero that eliminates national threat. The fall of New Order regime gives an opportunity to disclose a new perspective of history. The representation of 1965 is thrived as a belated testimony to the history.

1965 has many facets that can be disclosed, in consequent there are unending representation of the event. This paper will try to analyze the representation of the tragedy from two novel that are Saskia Wieringa’s *Lubang Buaya* (2003), and Putu Oka Sukanta’s *Istana Jiwa* (2012). The two novels are published after the fall of New Order. The two novels address the events from different perspectives. *Lubang Buaya* (2003) focuses on the

experience of Tommy, a foreign reporter who is interested to the tragedy of 1965 which end up in the jail. The story is told anachronistically and there are intertwined among flash back, memory and dream. *Istana Jiwa* (2012) depicts women's struggle in the hard time under the New Order regime after they lose their husband or their father. In this part, the analysis will be focused on the process on emplotment that emphasizes the structure of plot and elements that construct the narrative. The analysis will cover the concept of *present past*, *past present*, and *past future* as proposes by Alan Robinson (2006). After that, the focus of analysis will be on the history of trauma that represented in the narrative.

The two authors have different background. Putu Oka Sukanta is a survivor of 1965 events. He wrote several literary work such as *I Belog* (1980), *Tembang Jalak Bali* (1986), *Merajut Harkat* (1999), and *Istana Jiwa* (2012). His novel concerns mostly based on his experience as 1965 survivor. He has shown an interest to the art and to those who is marginalized since his youth. It is also the reason of his involvement in Lekra's activity. Differ from Sukanta, Wirienga is not a survivor. She is an outsider who is interested to study on 1965 tragedy. Wirienga wrote a novel based on her experience on studying Women's movement in Indonesia. Thus, her novel focuses on the reconstruction on the negative stance of Gerwani which is thought as one of the largest women movement in Indonesia. The two authors attempt to reconstruct 1965 tragedy and give voice to those who is marginalized and discriminated. Here are the description of each novels

To begin with, *Istana Jiwa* (2012) uses plot tragic comedy in depicting the events. It allows the readers to feel a horror of the atrocity but then relief because of the reverse of misfortune. The time span that is chosen into the setting is also the main reason the tragic comedy becomes the chosen plot. The time setting begins before 30th September 1965, when the atrocity has not been happened yet. The story explains the situation at that time which full of tensions among the ideologies. One of the prominent opposition is between Muslim party and communism party, as seen in the conversation between Fandi and Sony, his nephew who is the activist of CGMI.

"Kita sih tetap kecewa dengan sikap bung Karno," sahut sonny

"sikap yang mana?" Serga Fandi

"itu lho oom, kok tidak mau membubarkan HMI (himpunan Mahasiswa Islam). Apa takut sama Angkatan Darat? HMI kan dibeking 2) Angkatan Darat," Suara Sony agak kesal. Kemudian meneruskan, "Padahal Kawan Ketua sudah begitu bersemangat menyerukan pembubaran HMI. Saya ingat Kawan Ketua sewaktu di PPI (Pemuda Permusyawaratan Indonesia), kalau tidak salah tanggal 13 Maret yang lalu. Katanya, seharusnya tidak ada plintat plintut terhadap HMI. Saya menyokong penuh tuntutan PPI yang menuntut pembubaran HMI, yang seharusnya sudah lama bubar bersamaan dengan bubarnya masyumi." Keduanya terdiam. Sony menenangkan diri.

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"semua itu benar. Tetapi HMI, sebagai organisasi yang berbasis pada Islam jangan diremehkan. Bung Karno tentu tahu itu. Kalau membubarkan HMI, berarti Bung karno akan berhadapan dengan banyak pihak yang mendukung HMI, seperti partai-partai Islam, dan perkumpulan-perkumpulan yang berbasis Islam. Itu berat. Contohnya Germuis (Generasi Muda Islam) yang beberapa waktu lalu sudah berani menantang: langkah mayatku, sebelum ganyang HMI."

The conversation above shows the tension happened before the kidnap of the senior member of Army. It serves as a precondition of the conflict later in the event. Sony as an active member of CGMI feels disappointed towards Sukarto for his indecisive action to disband HMI. As a young generation and has a strong believe on his on ideology, Sony acts and talks more aggressive than Fandi. The events above also illuminates the political situation before 30th coup. Indonesia has three pole of power which Sukarno as former president tries to blend the power with his slogan *Nasakom* (*Nasionalis, Agama dan Komunis*/Nationalist, religion and communism). Although, Sukarno tries to control it, each parties is struggling to gain more

power than the other. Accordingly, the tension cannot be avoided. The scene foregrounds the conflict in the later events. The novel ends its story after the fall of New Order Regime which allows the author to put hope of new opportunity in his character and also shows the uncertainty of the future outcome. It seems to underline that the struggle has not ended yet. The end of the story presents the scene where Maria meets her step mother. A woman who gets married to her father after he leaves his family. She gives her father's dying message to tell story from his part and ask to lend her late husband's book for her son. However, Maria has none. Both are separated with uncertainty relationship and future. (IJ, 2012: 323).

The novel uses multi-focus point of view that enables the author to look closely to several characters and brings the reader to acknowledge the event from different perspectives. The chosen view point makes the story cannot be presented chronologically. Some events must be presented in flashback since there are changes in focus of attention. Some events or characters are also left without any continuation in the story line, for example Savitri, she is depicted in the beginning of the story as Sony's girlfriend that has capability in dancing and an activist of Lekra. However, after the coup, there is no story regarding her condition whether she can survive or not. The presence and absence of information seems to highlight the oscillation between knowing and unknowing. Thus, it presents the very nature of trauma.

Since the focus of attention is on several characters, there are several description on the traumatic moments. Kirtani accompanies by Sayang, her daughter and Zubaidah have to witness cruel interrogation when they try to search for their husband.

Dari ruang sebelah yang pintu dan jendelanya terbuka, sehingga bisa dilihat apa yang sedang terjadi, terdengar suara orang memerikasa tahanan.

"Kamu kan di Lubang Buaya itu. Kamu ikut membunuh jenderal kan?"

"Tidak, Pak. Saya ada di rumah. Saya tidak membunuh jenderal."

Kemudian terdengar suara bag big bug, pukulan-pukulan yang mendera tahanan. Ketiga tamu yang sedang menunggu komandan melihat ke arah ruangan itu. Sayang menyembunyikan mukanya di badan ibunya

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"sekarang pindahkan ke jempol kakinya. Kasih strum yang lama. Biar mampus."

Jeritan melengking memecah kesepian. Tak lama kemudian terdengar perintah, "siram biar siuman." (IJ, 2012: 73-75)

Kirtani, Sayang and Zubaidah in this scene act as a witness. Listening to other's traumatic experience can cause trauma too. Sayang is really shock and it makes her said to herself that she hates a soldier. Witnessing other's people trauma is also experienced by Maria when she is detained. She is witnessing how Lastri, another detainee is tortured and raped. Being a detainee and a witness to the catastrophic event left a scar in Maria's psyche which makes her afraid to face a soldier that comes to her house (IJ, 2012:182). The representation of traumatic events in *Istana Jiwa* (2012) clearly an attempt to disclose the condition of those who are accused, detained, and killed during the purge of communism which can raise the empathy towards them.

In an attempt to present the element of plausibility and verisimilitude, the novel also uses montage that is the uses of fragmentation of document or newspaper.

"Koran Angkatan bersenjata tanggal 3 November memuat protret dua gadis remaja yang ketakutan dengan pernyataan seorang Pemuda Rakyat yang menyebutkan bahwa ia melihat "tiga puluh orang Gerwani berteriak-teriak, menjiksa dan bermain-main dengan djendral Jani yang sudah dalam keadaan pingsan." (IJ, 2012: 86)

The fragment of the newspaper which is seen by Kirtani above is one of the publication that occurred in 1965. It is used to show the accusation towards Women's movement in order to reconstruct women's movement image. Kirtani shows ridiculous the accusation is. Thus, it serves as belated counter statement.

Lubang Buaya or *Crocodile Hole* uses tragic plot and anachronous events in presenting and representing Tommy's experience. Anachronous plot makes the reader has to connect jumble events that are presented. The opening scene is the jail where Tommy, the main character, is detained. Tommy is Dutch reporter who is interested in researching the history of women's movement in Indonesia. Later on, her research is focused on Gerwani. This is why she is captured by the New Order regime. A research on Gerwani or other's left group is forbidden Indonesia during the New Order.

The description of the flying cockroach and of dirty, bad smell, and lack of sun light cell show the miserable condition of Tommy in her detention. Her condition reminds her to the story of Tante Sri, one of her sources in her research on women's movement

"Bui merupakan dongeng bagi Tommy. Galeng dan Tante Sri telah menceritakannya dengan kalimat-kalimat pendek tanpa emosi. Sisanya dia simpulkan dari pandangan menerawang Tante Sri, juga apabila Galeng tiba-tiba terdiam di tengah suatu pembicaraan, atau dari suasana tegang yang membuatnya gemetar tiap sekelompok bekas tahanan berbicara tentang mereka yang selamat-mereka yang tidak selamat selalu ikut hadir. Nah Tommy berfikir pahit, sekarang paling tidak saya sendiri dapat memberikan sekedar warna khusus pada artikel yang akan kubuat bila suatu saat keluar dari sini" (LB: 2003: 3).

The above description shows unexpected experience that is faced by Tommy. She always considers that it is improbable for her to be captured since the events that she is interested to study has taken place long time ago and she is also a foreigner. However, it turns out to be otherwise. She is even detained in the same prison as Tante Sri. The scene above also shows that other's traumatic experience may not be comprehensible fully because it is without reference. Tommy gets more apprehension on the story that she pursued as she experiences it herself.

Based on the depiction on Tante Sri and Galeng, how someone dealing with traumatic memory is also shown. Tante Sri chooses to use short and unemotional sentence and sometimes be lost in thought. Galeng is shaking every time she remembers her own survival as it reminds her to those who do not survive. Caruth (1996) has emphasized that the element of trauma as the oscillation between life and death. Survive may be unbearable since the survivors do not really understand why they have to survive and become a witness for those who fail to do so. As it is happened to Galeng, the survivors are haunted by those who do not survive. Her shaking body shows she suffers an uncontrolled symptom of trauma related to her experience in facing massive death of her acquaintances.

After the description of the situation in the Jail. The next events is presented not in the chronological order as it is correspond to Tommy's memory. Concerning the presentation of events, They can be divided into four distinct types. First, the present time of the ordering time in the story line, that is the time in the jail and the experience that she faces there. There is not much description of the present moment. It is mostly as a bridge to her memory to her past experience. The present moment depicts her acquaintance with Bu Dar, a courier that bring her food and sometimes help her to get a message from her friends. Although Bu Dar often helps her, Tommy tends to disbelieve Bu Dar and thinks her a spy. The present moment also depicts when she is interrogated. In this part, Tommy serves as witness to the inhumanity process of interrogation. She imagined the soldiers that interrogate her the same as Nazi that is told by her grandfather (LB, 2003:21). The situation depicted an incomprehensible nature of the event related to 1965 tragedy.

The second type is memory related to the plot. It serves a causal relation to the present condition in the story time. This type of memory is about the time before her detention. Thus, it is a kind of flashback of the previous events in the story line. As it is presented anachronously, the reader has to connect one event to the other to make sense of the story. The third type is memory of her childhood. This memory is not related to the plot, but it has a function as metaphor which has layer of meaning that complicates the story. Childhood

memory is mostly about her grandfather. Grandfather is described as one who teaches Tommy to be strong. Sometimes, Tommy refers to him as a god which indicates the role of father (those who has power). Third is dream, same with memory of her childhood, dream has a function as metaphor that complicates the layer of meaning. The depiction of dream is vary, some dreams is about the sexual fantasy which represents the sexual fantasy of New Order regime towards Gerwani.

The distortion and layer of meaning show the complexity and incomprehensible nature of 1965 tragedy. As Wirienga (2003: v) mentions in the preface that her work is based on her attempt to illuminate what has not been addressed in her research paper due to the limitation of academic research writing. She tends to emphasize the wrong accusation to Gerwani's member that they are responsible for harassing the general of Army sexually. Moreover the accusation of performing a nude dance. The accusation that has risen the rage of many Indonesian to eradicate left parties' members, include Gerwani. Literary work gives her freedom to depict layer of meaning by presenting dream and fantasy to her work. As it uses tragedy as its plot, in the end Tommy is killed just after she signs her jail release statement. She is killed by the officer. The event indicates the repressive order of the regime and that her release statement discharge the officer from responsibility to her existence. In the course of the story, Tommy not only acts as a witness from the survivor's testimony but she is also a witness of her own traumatic experience.

5. CONCLUSION

Literature is a means to render the unspeakable trauma and history. Trauma is the experience of unbelievable shocking event that cannot be assimilated in the consciousness. Trauma is not only inherent in the psyche but also in the history. The catastrophic events such as massive rape and massacre makes history itself that traumatizes. To render the so called traumatic experience in literature, there are several layers of comprehension and interpretation. The way author emploting the narrative into a comprehensible events has to be closely examined before connect it into a wider context.

Istana Jiwa and Lubang Buaya try to represent the traumatic events of 1965 tragedy. The novels poses different way in presenting the story. Sukanta uses tragic comedy, nevertheless Wieringa uses tragedy as its plot. However, both try to disclose the marginal voice and reconstruct the history.

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